Fair Isn’t Always Equal

### Chapter 1: [The Differentiated Instruction Mind-set: Rationale and Definition](http://ciawarren.blogspot.com/2013/02/chapter-1.html)

With the beginning of Rick Wormeli’s book, we are presented with various example of differentiated instruction we may have encountered during our own experiences in middle and high school. There we plenty of examples, from desk arrangement to providing extra time, that illustrated how simple yet effective some of the practices are. It’s extremely important to use differentiated instruction, as “we give students the tools to handle whatever comes their way” (p. 5). Especially considering that our generation of teachers has such a bountiful field of scientific study to look at, backing up claims of multiple intelligences. I completely agree with Wormeli’s multi-faceted argument here in this first chapter. Students *need* to have classrooms tailored to their needs. School shouldn’t be a place where students have to abide by their teacher’s rigid instructions, or learn how to take a standardized test because that’s the only way they’ll really be graded, or expect the world to be so regimented. There are just as many job opportunities and life experiences as there are learner types, and it is our jobs as teachers to not only address these differences, but use effective practices in our classrooms to celebrate and use those differences to the student’s advantage, trying our best to ensure understanding and success in the kids. Without these practices, as is easily seen in many schools, students are bundled into ‘gifted’ and ‘slow learner’ groups, isolating them. Ignoring multiple intelligences can cause students to lose interest in school, setting them on a rocky path. Using differentiated instruction not only makes it easier for us, but helps the students in ways we couldn’t even imagine.

Chapter 2: Mastery

As I surmised from reading Chapter 1, Rick Wormeli is not only hoping for classrooms to be flexible – he wants these practices to help the students succeed and master their subjects. One of the things that, thinking as a teacher, makes me livid, is how absolutely saturated our education culture is in testing and scores. Just because a student can get a good grade, or fill in a bubble well enough, does not mean that student truly *knows* how to apply that information if given the task to do so. That’s how I define mastery, similarly to how Wormeli does. He says, in a specific, ELA example, that mastery is when “the student can point to any word in the sentence and explain it’s role, and explain how the word may change it’s role, depending on where it’s placed in the sentence” (p. 13). Yes, I need my students to understand what a part of speech is and what the definition of each is, but if they can’t apply that information, it’s useless to them (besides getting a good grade on a test). Differentiation aids in this, allowing me to try and tweak the classroom and my teaching to aid the students in what I deem to be proper understanding. This practice will also make it easier to students to acquire that knowledge, other than them trying to make their brains work in a fashion they don’t naturally, and then trying to simply remember the information and not master it.

### Chapter 3: [Principles of Successful Assessment in the Differentiated Classroom](http://ciawarren.blogspot.com/2013/02/chapter-3.html)

From a discussion on differentiated instruction and what it can do, Rick Wormeli's book now turns to a more concrete subject: assessment. It is not enough to write up a quick test and hand that out to students, expecting them to all succeed admirably. Not only do they have different levels of experience and mastery, but the students enter our classrooms with an already developed way of taking in and understanding material, which our tests could completely and totally oppose. Pre-assessments, formative assessments, and summative assessments are all important in understanding the students. This suggests that the classroom is a constantly changing place, where students are routinely checked on the various aspects of knowledge. It's not enough to through them the material then have them take one summative test - to make sure we're doing our best as teachers to ensure total mastery on a subject, we must constantly check in on the progress out our students.

     This is a lot of work, and I'm worried that it's nearly impossible to benefit all the students, all the time. Yes, it's important to create a constant quizzing of the students, but how can I possibly edit and work every single one of my tests and quizzes to each student's learning styles and capabilities? Is it enough that my classroom has desks arranged in a circle? Most likely not. But I can try my hardest, constantly, and discuss with the students if I feel their needs aren't being met enough.

Chapter 4: Three Important Types of Assessment

To ensure that all students are being judged fairly, the types of assessment must be as varied as the types of learners in the classroom. In Chapter four, Wormeli highlights three major and invaluable types of assessment:

* Portfolios – Instead of focusing on just the scores received on tests and exams, portfolios allow for a visual representation of the growth of the student, and “promote the ideals of differentiated classes” (p.44). Tests can be misleading: a student could understand the material but made a few mistakes, or they could be good at making choices but have no idea how to apply the material. A collection of various examples of their learning and knowledge allows the teacher to not only view their students’ growth, but learn how they learn.
* Rubrics – I loved the detailed and helpful prompts Wormeli provides in regard to rubrics, another type of assessment. Rubrics not only make the correction and assessment of the students easier, but also show how well they can follow rules and understand expectations. However, it’s not as easy as writing a few point values and saying what they need to achieve it. Making a rubric is an intensive process, where a teacher must think about content, clarity, practically, and fairness, identify wants, choose holistic or analytical, decide on wording.
* Self-Assessment – This has been a continuing suggestion in the books, and one I never thought of but am completely tied to. The UbD book suggests a notebook, MI suggests a letter system between the teacher and the students, but no matter what, student self-assessment is an incredibly useful tool to assess the students’ knowledge and your effectiveness. Students can express their worries or wants, highlight concerns, laud enjoyable lessons or assignments, ect.

By just including these three types of assessment, multiple intelligences and learning types are addressed and the classroom becomes an open and flexible environment where the students understand their knowledge of the material comes first, not the grade.

Chapter 5: Tiering Assessments

Rick Wormeli is an adamant user of tiering, and this Chapter is a very informative, in-depth look at the practice. In all honesty, however, it slightly confused me at first, and seems rather daunting (This might just be because he used a mathematical example to begin with). While the process does seem to completely invest a teacher in the procedure, tiering is important and is just another step to differentiating the classroom.

In general, Wormeli describes tiering as “emphasizing the adjustments [teachers] make in assessments according to students’ readiness levels” (p. 56). While focusing on intelligences types is important, for assessment the students’ knowledge and readiness is more important. By focusing on those aspects, teachers can tier a test to allow the students to reach similar but different answers while they take in the same material, the teacher can assess their knowledge, and the students aren’t being dragged behind or pulled ahead.

I really love the massive amounts of examples and prompts he’s giving us in FIAE. They’re detailed and explained thoroughly, and while I may not have a complete grasp on how to implement them now, having the book is fantastic utility for later on. William’s Creativity Taxonomy and RAFTs seem they most helpful and engaging towards the students, and I will definitely try to read closer in this section.

Chapter 6: Creating Good Test Questions

In a similar vein to assessment tiering, and well suited under the umbrella of differentiation, is the intricate creation of test questions. It’s important to use test questions to assess the students’ knowledge and skill. Yes, multiple-choice assessments can show basic understanding and are good objective questions, but there is no way for the student to express the inner workings of their thought processes by making one choice out of five. I especially enjoyed the opening example, where the student's thought processes are written out, but as a teacher there would be no one to understand their thinking by just assigning a multiple choice test. I've experienced this thousands of times while being a student - making a quick choice hinders by thoughts, and I feel I could produce a much better answer by explaining my thoughts. That's why it's extremely necessary to differentiate tests. Students like me need essays and responses so we can articulate our thoughts and problems, and students who work best under a time crunch or despise writing paragraphs have their chance as well. Obviously it's important to include both, and other strategies like true/false, fill in the blanks, etc., but making a test totally differentiated and catering to every students isn't the right path either. There is a sweet middle ground, where the test allows for students to feel comfortable in their strongest learning style, but also tests test taking skills and builds on weaker areas.